1: Whiting E-5 (1936-1937) 1941
OJ13 Kwoma OJ13

CHAPTER I

ENVIRONMENT, SOCIAL STRUCTURE, AND PERSONNEL

THE Kwoma live in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea on the Peilungua Mountains just north of the Sepik River and 265 river miles from its delta.[1] This small mountain system, not more than twenty square miles in area, is bounded on the south and west by the Sepik and a lake formed from a former oxbow in the river, and on the east and north by the vast, rolling watershed of the river which stretches to the foothills of the coastal ranges. It consists of a primary orographical feature in the shape of a letter *S* plus a series of short arterial ridges running off in all directions. From tip to tip as the crow flies the system measures a little over five miles in length. The slopes of these ridges are precipitous; in climbing it is often necessary to dig one's feet into the earth or hold onto vines to avoid falling. A dense forest of large trees covers the ridges and extends down to meet a sago swamp just above the level of the Sepik. The highest point, Ambunti Mountain, rises 1,520 feet above sea level.

The elevation of the Kwoma territory is not sufficient to cause any noticeable variation from the strictly tropical climate of the entire Sepik River Valley. The daily range in temperature, from an average of seventy-one degrees Fahrenheit at dawn to eighty-five in mid-afternoon, closely approximates the norm in the river villages. Humidity is high throughout the year. Some rain falls virtually every day and all-day storms are not uncommon, but the climate and precipitation are so uniform throughout the year that there is no clear-cut division into seasons. Gardens may be planted, cultivated, and harvested at any and all times of the year.

[1] The tribe is situated approximately four degrees and ten minutes south of the equator and one hundred and forty-two degrees and forty minutes east of Greenwich.

1: Whiting E-5 (1936-1937) 1941
OJ13 Kwoma OJ13

The Kwoma are a mountain-dwelling people. Except for the southeastern slope of Ambunti Mountain, site of the Ambunti Police Post,[1] they control the entire segment of the Peilungua Range which lies northwest of the Sepik. The territory they claim also includes enough of the sago swamps at the foot of these mountains to provide them with more than enough of the sago flour which is a staple in their diet. They are surrounded by swamp and river tribes. Living in the sago swamp somewhat to the northwest are the Amiki and Sowal people, and on a little group of hills to the northeast, separated by the swamp from the main range, live a half-dozen households who call themselves Yelagu. The Malu, Yambon, and Yessan, the river neighbors of the Kwoma, are linguistically and culturally distinct from the mountain people. When they converse with each other, each speaks his own language, which the other understands.

The Kwoma tribe consists of four subtribes: the Tangwishamp, the Urumbanj, the Koriasi, and the Hongwam.[2] Their territories are contiguous. The Hongwam, who dwell nearest Ambunti, were the group from which nearly all the data here presented were gathered, only a brief trip being made to the other three subtribes. These four subtribes, although speaking the same language and bound by not a few ties of trade and intermarriage, are distinct social entities and are not above carrying on head-hunting raids against one another.[3] More frequently, however, they will band to-

[1] While the fieldwork on which this report is based was being carried on, Ambunti was still a functioning administrative post. Since then this station has been moved to Marui, approximately thirty-five miles downstream, to facilitate communication with the District headquarters at Wewak.

[2] The terms "tribe" and "subtribe" have been adopted here although it might be objected that, since there is no political organization which unites these four groups, it is improper to call the Kwoma a tribe.

[3]

Native Name	*Name Appearing on Maps and in Australian Record Books*	*Population*
Hongwam	Waskuk—Bangus	374
Koriyasi	Chissaraman (Shasherman)	116
Urumbanj	Urumbans (Urumbanji)	108
Tangwishamp	Tangunjambi (Taunjambi)	*circa* 300

Hongwam is referred to as Washkuk by M. Mead in *Sex and Temperament* and in "The Mountain Arapesh: I. An Importing Culture," *Anthro-*

2: Whiting E-5 (1936-1937) 1970 OJ13 Kwoma OJ13

Chapter I Orientation[1]

131 The Kwoma live in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea on the Pailangua Mountains, just north of the Sepik River and 265 river miles from its delta. 131 This small mountain system, not more than twenty square miles in area, is 133 bounded on the south and west by the Sepik and a lake formed by a former oxbow in the river, and on the east and north by the vast rolling watershed 133 of the river which stretches to the foothills of the coastal ranges. It consists of a primary orographical feature in the shape of a letter s, plus a series of short arterial ridges running off in all directions. From tip to tip as the crow flies the system measures a little over five miles in length. The slopes of these ridges are precipitious; in climbing it is often necessary to dig one's feet into the earth or hold onto vines to avoid falling. A dense forest of large trees covers the ridges and extends down to meet a sago swamp just above the level of the Sepik. The highest point, Ambunti Mountain, rises 1,320 feet above sea level.

---

[113] 1 For the following orientation, certain materials are quoted from the published reports on the Kwoma listed below:

"Kwoma Culture," John W.M. Whiting and Stephen W. Reed, Oceania, Vol. IX, No. 2, December 1938, pp. 170-216.
Becoming a Kwoma, John W.M. Whiting, Yale University Press, 1941.

131 The Kwoma are a mountain-dwelling people. Except for the southeastern
133 slope of Ambunti Mountain, site of the Ambunti Police Post, they control the
entire segment of the Prince Alexander Range which lies northwest of the Sepik.
[262] The territory they claim also includes enough of the sago swamps at the
foot of these mountains to provide them with more than enough of the sago
101 flour which is a staple in their diet. They are surrounded by swamp and
131 river tribes. Living in the sago swamp somewhat to the northwest are the
Amiki and Sowei people, and on a little group of hills to the northeast,
separated by the swamp from the main range, live a half-dozen households who
[197] call themselves Yelagu. The Malu, Yambon, and Yessan, the river neighbors
[191] of the Kwoma, are linguistically and culturally distinct from the mountain
people. When they converse with each other, each speaks his own language,
which the other understands.

619 The Kwoma tribe consists of four subtribes: the Tangwishamp, the
Urambanj, the Koriasi, and the Hongwam. Their territories are contiguous.
[101] The Hongwam, who dwell nearest Ambunti, were the group from which nearly all
the materials here presented were gathered, only a brief trip being made to
[197] the other three subtribes. These four subtribes, although speaking the
[721] same language and bound by not a few ties of trade and intermarriage, are
distinct social entities and not above carrying on head-hunting raids against
one another. More frequently, however, they will band together for raids
against threatened or actual encroachments by non-Kwoma peoples.

361 Each subtribe is divided into several hamlets, most of which are
[368] clustered about a "house tamberan" or men's ceremonial lodge. A hamlet
[423] is usually named after its house tamberan. The arrangement of dwellings in
a hamlet is determined by hereditary ownership of land and also by the
paucity of level sites, owing to the precipitous nature of the mountain slopes.

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 1.